

SAKHALIN—WHAT IT IS.

The Aboriginal Tribes and Russian Convicts on the Interesting Island.

In a book published in 1903 under the title of "Un Bague Russe. L'île de Sakhaline," M. Paul Labbé gives an interesting account of the aboriginal tribes and Russian convicts on the island of Sakhalin.

It is unnecessary to allude to the physical characteristics of Sakhalin. They have been sufficiently described since the island has occupied so large a space in the eyes of the world. Of the value of Sakhalin to the Russians, apart from strategic or political reasons, M. Labbé has this to say: "Sakhalin is only a speck in the vast Asiatic possessions of Russia, where there are so many richer provinces more accessible and less difficult to colonize. Russia has much to initiate and accomplish in its Asiatic empire. It will gain nothing by diffusing its efforts. Sakhalin is maintained at great expense, but will become more prosperous in the future."

Russians never speak of Sakhalin except in terms of vague horror.

Of the Russian officials stationed on the island, the author says that they have two great defects—love of liquor and of cards. Their gambling debts assume large proportions. German and Russian commercial houses at Vladivostok lend willingly to these gentry, taking advantage of their indebtedness to exact exorbitant interest.

Although M. Labbé does not say it in so many words, he leaves it to be inferred that the administration of the island is utterly rotten and corrupt.

There are two tribes of aborigines; restricted in numbers, living on Sakhalin. The Giliaks, who occupy the northern, and the Ainu, to whom is reserved the southern end. The Giliaks are said to have migrated from the valley of the Amur, but their habits, tools and customs suggest the extreme northern portion of the American continent as their place of origin. The Giliaks being brought into contact with Russian convicts, the Ainu, are very much more deteriorated and corrupt than the latter, who are more in touch with the Japanese.

The Giliaks always speak with terror of their first acquaintance with the Russians. They regard them as savage and monstrous. The Giliak village rarely consists of more than six houses. When a white man approaches one of them he is greeted with the furious barking of dogs. If they happen not to be tethered or under control of a native he will surely be attacked and devoured. These animals are always rendered furious by the scent of a white man, whose odor they have never been able to endure. The wealth of a Giliak consists mainly in the number of dogs he owns. These animals constitute the currency of the people; they supply the place of coin. Wives are purchased in dogs; the price varying from one to ten, according to the youth and comeliness of the woman. The Giliaks are of an ugly type; high cheek bones, round head, flat faces and large ears without lobes. Their color is a yellow brown. They are small—the men with little beard—broad shoulders, short legs and an immense mouth. They are very dirty. The Giliaks wash themselves once in winter, and then with seal grease. For a woman to wash herself is considered an unpardonable sin.

Each village is usually made up of members of the same family. A Giliak comes into the world with so many fathers and mothers that it is difficult for a stranger to determine his actual parentage. A child calls "yuk" not only his proper father, but the latter's brothers and first cousins. The mother and her sisters and first cousins. Marriage between blood relations is forbidden. When a child is born it receives a name. If through carelessness it is that of a person still living, both it is supposed, and die within a year. The names of the male children are significant of strength, courage or intelligence; those of the females relate to some incident of the moment. M. Labbé tells of one who was named "Incendary," because a fire was raging at the moment she was born. Another was called "Abundance of Fish," because her birth was coincident with a phenomenal run of fish. Brothers and sisters are allowed to play together until they reach a certain age, when they are separated and not permitted even to speak to each other except with averted eyes. The boys are taught to fish and hunt; the girls are instructed in household duties.

The Giliaks are polygamists, although polyandry prevails among them to a very great extent. M. Labbé tells of one who had two wives. He desired to sell the older of the two, although he acknowledged she was the more useful to him. He had paid three dogs for this lady, with an annual tribute to her father of a single one. He had died. The husband thought that this released him from payment of the yearly tax, but the heirs of the deceased disputed it. He was at the moment negotiating with them, offering to restore the lady to her relatives, on the plea of a dog, was of more use to him than a wife.

In marriage the consent of the girl is not required. She is purely an object of barter. A man cannot purchase a second wife without the acquiescence of the first one. Married women are usually well behaved. They perform all the hard labor. When they go to the woods to collect fuel they go in groups under the surveillance of a chaperon, an old man expert in the business. He, however, is sometimes foiled. The author tells of a youth named Drivin, very good looking and a glib talker. He was a roué, the terror of husbands and chaperons. He was asked why he did not marry. "What is the use," he replied, "to pay out dogs when all the women are chasing me?" When an elder brother absents himself from home, if he has a younger one, the latter assumes the other's marital rights during his absence. The elder brother under similar circumstances has no such claim on the wife of his junior.

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The Giliaks look upon disease as a punishment inflicted by evil spirits for various sins. The more serious are murder, rape, permitting the household fire to be extinguished; spitting in it, curing seal grease, whereas than by the heat of the sun. Curative active methods are very primitive. Fevers and headaches are treated by scarifying the forehead and pinching the skin until the blood flows. Sore eyes are poulticed with the bark of wild cherry. Cataplasms of wet earth are used. The most effective cure is thought to be a talisman of every family has one or more. They have doctors or sorcerers who indulge in the mummerly of their kind. Of late, however, they have come into disrepute on account of practicing a kind of charge for medical attention. When they were content with donations of fish or game they were held in high regard; but now that they are asking a dog for each professional visit they are not much employed.

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The Ainu, the second of the aboriginal tribes on the island of Sakhalin, are objects of even greater interest. They occupy the southern end of the island. While they and the Giliaks have a good deal in common, the Ainu are more civilized—least a portion of them—owing to intercourse with the Japanese, who have established fisheries near some of the villages and given them employment. Through this association they have been able to supply themselves with modern tools. Moreover, the Japanese have taught them how to enlarge their physical comfort. The Ainu are more reserved and less confident of themselves than the Giliaks. When a stranger enters the hut of the latter he is greeted with laughter and childish antics; when he goes into that of the other he encounters serious, grave reserve. M. Labbé says that the conversation of an Ainu is tinged with melancholy. His stories or legends are full of sadness.

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The Russians have attempted proselyting among the Ainu, but with little success. They cannot be weaned from the idea that a god is other than vindictive and cruel. They devote themselves to the propagation of the malevolent deity. M. Labbé gives an example of this character. The Ainu, Pouka, one of the companions of the author, was a big Ainu, very jovial and obliging. With his long black beard and ragged clothing he had the air of a brigand, whereas he was the most gentle of men. Always in his company was a certain Otaka, a most interesting person, who told melancholy stories and recited Ainu legends. He spoke Russian very well and was fond of the Russian discussion.

"A Russian pope," he said to the author, "tried to convert me to his religion, but he was only the priest of a false god. He depicted his God as beneficent and good, always ready to protect man and pardon him. A God as benevolent as that cannot exist: it is useless to pray to Him because he cannot do us any harm. Gods are wicked and they amuse themselves in seeing us suffer. Often a poor little rat comes out of his hole in our cage, and runs after him, licking and snapping. They seize and play with him. He suffers for a long time. Now the evil spirits and gods are like these dogs. This poor little rat is the unhappy Ainu whom they torture for their pleasure."

Labbé asked Otaka if he thought gods and evil spirits could be placated with prayer.

"No, I do not think so," he replied. "When the snow falls and the sea is furious the mother and her sisters and first cousins. Marriage between blood relations is forbidden. When a child is born it receives a name. If through carelessness it is that of a person still living, both it is supposed, and die within a year. The names of the male children are significant of strength, courage or intelligence; those of the females relate to some incident of the moment. M. Labbé tells of one who was named 'Incendary,' because a fire was raging at the moment she was born. Another was called 'Abundance of Fish,' because her birth was coincident with a phenomenal run of fish. Brothers and sisters are allowed to play together until they reach a certain age, when they are separated and not permitted even to speak to each other except with averted eyes. The boys are taught to fish and hunt; the girls are instructed in household duties."

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to discard clothing. About eighty convicts are confined in each cage. They are so crowded that in sleeping the head of one rests on the body of his neighbor. Punishments administered while on the ship are very severe—the whip, irons and confinement in a dark cell where the prisoner can barely breathe. In 1901, in midsummer, one of these convict ships was obliged to remain at Saigou for several weeks to make repairs. Eight hundred convicts in the terrible heat and their disgusting promiscuity, suffered indescribable agonies. When the convicts arrive at Sakhalin they are distributed among the six prisons on the island, two on the west coast, three in the interior and one in the southern portion. M. Labbé visited all of them, and underwent temporary confinement in one in order to get "local color." One prison resembles the other; great racks, with an interior into which the cells open. Sometimes as many as fifty convicts are crowded into a single cell. Each prison consists of two divisions, one of correction—the other of amelioration.

Convicts condemned to life imprisonment remain eight years in the first and two in the second. Those sentenced to more than twenty years at hard labor have the period of confinement gradually reduced until those deported for minor offenses suffer only nominal sequestration. When convicts have completed their term in prison they are supplied with an ax, saw and ropes and sent into the interior as colonists. For two years, while they are building a hut and clearing the ground for cultivation, they are supplied with provisions; after that they are obliged to support themselves upon what they can get from the soil. Their condition is so wretched and they are so near starvation that many commit crime in order to be returned to prison. After fourteen years of service as convict colonists they are called "peasants." They have then the privilege of living on the mainland or even of returning to European Russia.

A good many convicts succeed in making their escape. In summer they hide in the holds of boats sailing across the narrow strait which separates Sakhalin from the mainland. In the winter they are able to cross on the ice. If they succeed in evading the vigilance of the coast guards they have a long perilous journey on foot across Asiatic Russia before them. One female convict and her three children—she was successful in accomplishing it. When she reached her native village in Russia she was recognized, arrested and returned to Sakhalin.

M. Labbé calls the directors of the prisons "minister plenipotentiary." They are the real masters of the island. The other functionaries are mere tools in their hands; applied upon by convicts set to watch them in the hope that they may be detected in some deviation from which the directors may profit. These sell on the sly to merchants on the island goods made in the prisons. In this way they would gain enough to make themselves independently rich, were it not for their passion for gambling, which puts in circulation the money of which they are defrauding the Government. Moreover, these directors are mercilessly cruel to the poor creatures over whom they rule. For amusement they will enclose a convict in a barrel and roll him down a hill. The whistle of the lash of the whip is music to them. Yet M. Labbé says there is no instance of a convict attempting the life of a director of prisons. They are so terrorized and cowed that all spirit of resistance or revenge is crushed out of them.

There is great inequality and injustice in the treatment of the convicts. To a good looking woman prisoner life is made very easy and agreeable. It is the same with a man who has money to bribe officials. A young criminal of a family of influence committed for murder has it changed into a political offense and enjoys the privileges granted this class of offenders. A Russian officer of rank was sent to Sakhalin for selling military secrets to a foreign power. He was put in charge of confidential papers relating to the administration of the island. M. Labbé had barely arrived at Sakhalin when this officer came and offered to sell him copies of these documents.

It may be asked why are all these things, these injustices and cruelties, possible? There are supposed to be inspectors sent from St. Petersburg to remedy these evils. They are sent, but no sooner do they arrive than they disappear with mysterious promptness. There is a Governor of the island. He is full of good intentions but his term of office is so brief that he is little better than a visiting stranger. He sees only what he is permitted to see. In fact, he hears less than a visitor. Officials avoid meeting him; everything is hidden that can be concealed. An honest official does not dare speak. One who instituted inquiries in regard to a great number of prisoners was waging at cards was immediately dismissed from office. A convict said to M. Labbé that what he was relating seemed to frighten him. What would be the effect upon his auditor if he told the full truth? Yet, notwithstanding the frightful punishments dealt out to the convicts, the colonist prisoners consider their life so much harder than, to escape it, they would willingly return to prison.

When the Devil is Loose in Mexico. From the Mexican Herald. A big fire, a suicide and a number of accidents in the city and a heavy wind and rain storm here and numerous crimes and accidents in many parts of the Republic were the natural result of one day's leave of absence taken by his diabolical majesty the devil yesterday—a leave of absence which his majesty spends in this earthly planet along a number of days which he spends in the underworld. It is a common belief among all Mexicans that on the day of San Bartolo, which was yesterday, the devil is loose and many unpleasant things happen. The devil is supposed to be busy all the year around, but on the day of San Bartolo he takes a little rest and comes to the earth to see how things are going on. That is, he comes on a trip of inspection to see the prospects for the coming year.

Many people are so superstitious about this that they stay at home all day and refuse to receive calls because, according to tradition, it occurred one time that the devil disguised himself as a woman, and a poor fellow wanted to carry away. The object of the visit was briefly explained and the interested party was not excited. The devil, however, dropped dead, whereupon the devil carried away their souls.

The superstition is much more widely spread in the States of the interior. In Guadalajara, for the day when the city shall be destroyed by a flood and a hurricane, according to the prediction of a priest who many years ago, although nobody knows the name of that prophet nor the year when he made his prophecy.

Instead of Swearing. From the Kansas City Journal. A Holton man who had never been known to warble a note was heard the other day singing in a loud voice the old song "Swear, Swear, Swear." The song was "Swear, Swear, Swear." A surprised neighbor asked him the cause of such an outbreak. "I will tell you," he said, "I could not control myself. I did not know I could sing. I tried it one day. Now when I feel like swearing I take to singing, and I expect you will find me in the neighborhood of most of the time."

Back to Town. From the Mountain View and the Salt Sea. By trail and oke by train. A cry rings to the autumn sky: "It's 'Hoy for the town today!" We have had enough of things in the rough. Of the rural moon and stars; We'll be glad to hear, though it may sound queer, The song of the trolley car.

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Many people are so superstitious about this that they stay at home all day and refuse to receive calls because, according to tradition, it occurred one time that the devil disguised himself as a woman, and a poor fellow wanted to carry away. The object of the visit was briefly explained and the interested party was not excited. The devil, however, dropped dead, whereupon the devil carried away their souls.

The superstition is much more widely spread in the States of the interior. In Guadalajara, for the day when the city shall be destroyed by a flood and a hurricane, according to the prediction of a priest who many years ago, although nobody knows the name of that prophet nor the year when he made his prophecy.

POEMS WORTH READING.

Back to Town. From the Mountain View and the Salt Sea. By trail and oke by train. A cry rings to the autumn sky: "It's 'Hoy for the town today!" We have had enough of things in the rough. Of the rural moon and stars; We'll be glad to hear, though it may sound queer, The song of the trolley car.

We have trotted and trotted, we have barreled, In the terrible heat and their disgusting promiscuity, suffered indescribable agonies. When the convicts arrive at Sakhalin they are distributed among the six prisons on the island, two on the west coast, three in the interior and one in the southern portion. M. Labbé visited all of them, and underwent temporary confinement in one in order to get "local color." One prison resembles the other; great racks, with an interior into which the cells open. Sometimes as many as fifty convicts are crowded into a single cell. Each prison consists of two divisions, one of correction—the other of amelioration.

Convicts condemned to life imprisonment remain eight years in the first and two in the second. Those sentenced to more than twenty years at hard labor have the period of confinement gradually reduced until those deported for minor offenses suffer only nominal sequestration. When convicts have completed their term in prison they are supplied with an ax, saw and ropes and sent into the interior as colonists. For two years, while they are building a hut and clearing the ground for cultivation, they are supplied with provisions; after that they are obliged to support themselves upon what they can get from the soil. Their condition is so wretched and they are so near starvation that many commit crime in order to be returned to prison. After fourteen years of service as convict colonists they are called "peasants." They have then the privilege of living on the mainland or even of returning to European Russia.

A good many convicts succeed in making their escape. In summer they hide in the holds of boats sailing across the narrow strait which separates Sakhalin from the mainland. In the winter they are able to cross on the ice. If they succeed in evading the vigilance of the coast guards they have a long perilous journey on foot across Asiatic Russia before them. One female convict and her three children—she was successful in accomplishing it. When she reached her native village in Russia she was recognized, arrested and returned to Sakhalin.

M. Labbé calls the directors of the prisons "minister plenipotentiary." They are the real masters of the island. The other functionaries are mere tools in their hands; applied upon by convicts set to watch them in the hope that they may be detected in some deviation from which the directors may profit. These sell on the sly to merchants on the island goods made in the prisons. In this way they would gain enough to make themselves independently rich, were it not for their passion for gambling, which puts in circulation the money of which they are defrauding the Government. Moreover, these directors are mercilessly cruel to the poor creatures over whom they rule. For amusement they will enclose a convict in a barrel and roll him down a hill. The whistle of the lash of the whip is music to them. Yet M. Labbé says there is no instance of a convict attempting the life of a director of prisons. They are so terrorized and cowed that all spirit of resistance or revenge is crushed out of them.

There is great inequality and injustice in the treatment of the convicts. To a good looking woman prisoner life is made very easy and agreeable. It is the same with a man who has money to bribe officials. A young criminal of a family of influence committed for murder has it changed into a political offense and enjoys the privileges granted this class of offenders. A Russian officer of rank was sent to Sakhalin for selling military secrets to a foreign power. He was put in charge of confidential papers relating to the administration of the island. M. Labbé had barely arrived at Sakhalin when this officer came and offered to sell him copies of these documents.

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Instead of Swearing. From the Kansas City Journal. A Holton man who had never been known to warble a note was heard the other day singing in a loud voice the old song "Swear, Swear, Swear." The song was "Swear, Swear, Swear." A surprised neighbor asked him the cause of such an outbreak. "I will tell you," he said, "I could not control myself. I did not know I could sing. I tried it one day. Now when I feel like swearing I take to singing, and I expect you will find me in the neighborhood of most of the time."

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